



The Empire Tract in Carlstadt.

Xanadu

In March 2005, the Meadowlands Sports Complex, presided over by the New Jersey Sports and Exposition Authority, moved forward with construction of the Meadowlands Xanadu entertainment complex. Though the sports complex does not fall under NJMC jurisdiction, large projects like this one must come before a joint review panel assembled by the NJMC and the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection. In 2004 the NJMC and NJDEP served as hearing officers for the \$1.3 billion Xanadu project.

To properly defend the interests of residents living and working around this large venture, the NJMC and NJDEP directed the NJSEA and developers to deal

with the following salient issues, some of which have already been resolved:

- The entire 587-acre Empire Tract in Carlstadt was turned over to the Meadowlands Conservation Trust in March 2005 for preservation, as the hearing officers' report mandated.
- The developers provided \$769,000 to restore the Secaucus High School Marsh, as mandated by the report.
- Xanadu will pay for its share of all off-site traffic improvements required for the complex. This is in addition to its initial \$65 million contribution.

- Meadowlands Xanadu will provide a total of \$2 million to the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs to establish Main Street New Jersey Programs in Meadowlands downtowns to ensure synergy with Xanadu.
- A permanent air quality monitoring station will be installed under the guidance of the NJDEP to ensure compatibility with NJDEP's overall air quality monitoring network.
- The developers will pay more than \$1 million dollars over the course of the first four years of the project and then \$1.65 million every year after that to the NJMC Municipal Assistance Program to help municipalities pay for impacts from Xanadu and the Sports Complex.
- The municipalities of East Rutherford and Carlstadt will be given cash contributions to provide affordable housing opportunities.
- The Xanadu project will be integrated with pedestrian-friendly paths called Meadows Path that connect to other parts of the Meadowlands District and offer wildlife watching opportunities.

Solid Waste and Natural Resources Groups

A total of 36 employees separated into Solid Waste, Wetlands, and Parks and Open Space groups comprise the Solid Waste and Natural Resources unit of the agency. These groups oversee the sanitary disposal of construction debris and other waste in the District, preserve and protect the District's wetlands, and create and maintain parks.

Milestones of 2004-2005:

Solid Waste

Kearny Green Space Initiative

In support of the environmental portion of the four NJMC policy areas, the Solid Waste Group oversees a solid waste management plan for the region, and works to close abandoned landfills that continue to threaten the Meadowlands ecosystem.

In January 2005, the NJMC's Board

of Commissioners made a heavy commitment to its environmental mandate by setting in motion an ambitious \$53 million plan to save the Kearny Marsh, solve the threat of pollution from the adjacent Keegan Landfill, and create a 500-acre park that will serve as the southern gateway to the 8,400 acre Meadowlands environmental preserve. The plan developed from a meeting between members of the NJMC staff, Kearny Mayor Alberto

G. Santos, the Town Council, and members of the community to discuss options for the future of the abandoned landfill and marsh.

The Kearny Marsh is currently threatened by the defunct Keegan Landfill, an abandoned 110-acre dump lying in the southern portion. The dump, operated during the 1950s and 60s, was never properly sealed, nor were proper actions taken to prevent



Kearny Marsh.



Soil investigations at Keegan Landfill, the site of a future 500-acre park that will serve as the southern gateway to the Meadowlands environmental preserve.

contaminants from leaking out. Zinc, mercury, chromium, PCBs, and other contaminants have been found in the nearby wetlands and are assumed to come from Keegan Landfill. The landfill has caught fire several times and is considered unsafe to be on without proper escort.

Ironically, in 1978 the Kearny Marsh was considered the best freshwater marsh in the state by members of the New Jersey Audubon Society. Since then, this, the largest freshwater marsh in the Meadowlands, has lost vital habitat to damaging water levels and the threat of

continuing pollution. Planning and engineering work for the Kearny Green Space Initiative is currently under way.

Wetlands

Conservation Plan

Another project advancing the environmental component of the four policy areas is the Meadowlands Conservation Plan, which began in July 2004. The District-wide conservation plan will cement progress in the ecological recovery of the Meadowlands and chart a path to further rehabilitation. By funding the first year of

the three-year plan, at a cost of \$240,000, the agency's Board of Commissioners further bolstered the Meadowlands Master Plan and its preservation of 8,400 acres of open space, wetlands, and waterways along the Hackensack River.

The Conservation Plan will follow the format of the statewide Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy. Wildlife in the Meadowlands that need the greatest conservation efforts will be identified. The Meadowlands' critical wildlife habitats will be mapped out. An action plan and monitoring goals will be

established, with periodic reviews planned. Since the Meadowlands District is centered on a highly urbanized wetlands – one of the country’s largest – the best way to accommodate and facilitate proper public access will also be examined.

Bird Population Survey

The Conservation Plan builds on several on-going studies including a two-year survey of Meadowlands bird populations being performed by the New Jersey Audubon Society.

In February 2004, the board of the NJMC launched an effort to conduct a major survey of bird populations, allocating \$100,000

for the project. The survey covers, for the first time, the entire Meadowlands wetlands ecosystem and tabulates numbers of birds, the species, their behavior, and their habitat. Previous fragmentary surveys have shown that the Meadowlands’ diverse ecosystem is visited by more than 260 species of birds including 26 of New Jersey’s endangered and threatened birds.

Secaucus High School Marsh

Preparation commenced in April 2005, for the \$1.4 million restoration of the 42-acre Secaucus High School Marsh. Along with providing improved wildlife habitat, the project will give residents better flood control and



A tree swallow.

a boardwalk over the wetlands connecting two portions of what will eventually be the 15-mile Secaucus Greenway. The marshes will also become an outdoor classroom for the adjoining Secaucus High School.

The project will include scientific instruments hard-wired into the marsh to monitor water quality, dissolved-oxygen and tidal flows. The resulting data will be transmitted to the NJMC’s labs in Lyndhurst. This will help test new ways to restore marshes and will result in techniques that can be taken to other sites across the District.



A bird blind located in Richard W. DeKorte Park, Lyndhurst.



Mill Creek Point Park, Secaucus.

Parks and Open Space:

Mill Creek Point Park

In another advancement for the environmental mission, the NJMC joined with the Town of Secaucus in October 2004 to celebrate the opening of the new 7½-acre Mill Creek Point Park. The new park, owned by the Town of Secaucus, was supported financially by

the NJMC and designed by the NJMC's Parks and Open Space Group. It includes a boat launch for canoes and kayaks, ornamented wildlife viewing areas, interpretive signage, special landscaping, and places for catch-and-release fishing.

The park serves as the trailhead for the 2½-mile Mill Creek Canoe Trail and will eventually be the northern terminus of the Secaucus Greenway, which will parallel the Hackensack River.

performed throughout 2004 and early 2005. The resulting data was compared to an identical survey conducted during the 1980s.

While 85 percent of the fish counted in the '80s were minnow-sized, pollution-tolerant mummichog, the fish population today is much more diverse with more large predator fish. In the '80s there were 85 striped bass collected. In the recent survey, 1,123 of this popular game fish were collected. Similarly, 774 white perch were found in the '80s while in the recent survey 11,451 were found. The result is that though there are fewer individual fish, there are more large fish in the water. A comparison of the two surveys shows a dramatic 136 percent increase in the total weight of all the fish collected.

However, while the fish population is more diverse, white perch, the most abundant game species found in the study, and therefore the most likely to be caught recreationally by fishers, are not considered edible due to Mercury and PCB contamination.

Continuous Water Monitoring Initiative

To further back environmental policies with good data, in September 2004, NJMC scientists commenced a 24-hour water quality monitoring system with

instruments sending real time data to the agency's labs in Lyndhurst from throughout the District. The initiative is designed to provide a report card on the health of the Hackensack River and test theories on the origins of oxygen depleted waters in the southern part of the Meadowlands.



Air quality monitor located in Richard W. DeKorte Park, Lyndhurst.

Air Quality

On another front, starting in November 2004, the first-ever District-wide air quality study was commenced by the NJMC. The three-year study – with a budget of up to \$700,000 – is being conducted by the Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences Institute. This Institute is part of

the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey - Robert Wood Johnson Medical School.

Measurements are being recorded systematically at key locations and at different times during the year. The results will establish data that can be compared with future data to measure progress on achieving air quality aims set by the Master Plan.

Kearny Marsh Restoration

In addition to the Kearny Green Space Initiative being carried out by the Solid Waste and Wetlands Groups, the NJMC received a grant from the federal Environmental Protection Agency to study a new technology that may seal off contaminated sediments in the Kearny Marsh in hopes of restoring it to its original ecological vibrancy.

The \$385,700 grant will help fund a three-and-a-half-year pilot study by MERI that will examine the ability of AquaBlok, a patented capping material, to trap and secure pollutants in the marsh floor while allowing plants and aquatic life to thrive above.

